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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 001449

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [SNAR](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: REGIME'S DESTRUCTIVE ATTEMPTS TO CORRUPT YOUTH AND COERCE PARTY SUPPORT

Classified By: APAO K. Penland for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: On Dec. 22, Charge Villarosa hosted a small gathering of high-level NLD women (including four MPs) representing Rangoon, Mandalay and Mogok cities, Bago Division, Karen State, Shan State, and Mon State. The Charge arranged the meeting to gather information on the situation outside Rangoon and to establish contacts that will serve as a foundation for the Charge's future travels. The NLD matriarchs, some who had snuck out of their homes, covertly boarded trains for Rangoon, and shook the Burmese secret police assigned to tail them, shared their tales of government destruction in their region and encouraged the Charge to come and witness for herself the government's corruption of youth, coercion of party support, and destructive economic policies. The regime is "systematically destroying and destabilizing young people," stated the Mogok representative. The women all agreed that the regime used prostitution, gambling and drugs as tools to degrade and distract the youth of Burma.

¶12. (C) The NLD high-level representatives also took the opportunity to encourage U.S. pressure at the U.N. and with ASEAN. The representative from Mon State stated that the Malaysian Foreign Minister's precondition for a visit, that Aung San Suu Kyi be released, is not enough. Suu Kyi must also be permitted to take an active role in the nation's politics, she said. If Suu Kyi is not allowed to participate, said the Mon representative, it would be a big loss. The Charge told the women that the U.S. would continue to press for national reconciliation that includes Suu Kyi and "all members" of the country and political process. The Charge also denounced the National Convention as a "sham," ridiculing the process for not allowing debate, questions, or full political participation. "You very much need a new government that serves the people rather than the people serving the government," said the Charge. END SUMMARY

Regime Encourages Prostitution, Gambling & Drug Abuse

¶13. (C) The Karen State MP said that the HIV/AIDS problems in her state were very severe. She said the Global Fund never reached Karen State. (The NLD women said that while the Global Fund was operating, the government blocked funds from reaching persons, and sometimes entire regions, known to be supportive of NLD.) The Karen State leader added that the regime attempts to distract the youth from current troubles by throwing street festivals, or "pwes." Pwes are a beloved tradition in Burma, but the regime is heightening the appeal of the festivities by encouraging the cease-fire group DKBA to supply brothels and prostitutes at the festivals, said the Karen State MP. She said the easy supply and accessibility to prostitutes is causing an explosion of HIV infections. The MP said of 20 students tested for HIV in the Karen State, 12 tested positive for the disease. The MP stated she personally knew of three people from "good homes" who died in the last month from AIDS. The Charge said she was aware that providing HIV/AIDS medical care in the Karen state is extremely problematic, noting that Medicines Sans Frontiers is going to withdraw from Burma because it received no government cooperation in accessing the Karen and Mon states.

¶14. (C) The NLD leader from Mogok also said that HIV/AIDS is rampant in her region, though not as bad as it is in Karen State. She said the youth in her city are corrupted by regime-encouraged gambling. For 200,000 kyat (less than 200 U.S. dollars), an entrepreneur can bribe or buy a "lease" from the government to operate a gambling facility. She said the gambling institutions degrade the morals of the youth, destroy their desire for an education, and leave no room for thoughts about politics. The women all agreed that gambling was a big problem throughout the country. (NOTE: From the last King of Burma who created a lottery system in Mandalay to present day department stores that offer weekly prizes for their patrons (the more you spend, the more tickets you receive), lotteries are a pervasive part of Burmese culture. In downtown Rangoon, gaming rooms accessible by the most common person provide video gambling games at which people can win and lose real money).

¶15. (C) Drug abuse is the third distraction the regime is actively encouraging in a ploy to steer the youth away from politics, said the NLD women. The Mogok representative said

that the regime offers a bounty of 100,000 kyat (less than \$100 U.S.) to each person who hooks a youth "from a good family" on drugs. The Mogok leader added that Methamphetamine confiscated by police is simply sold back on the street by the authorities for a lower price.

Regime's Backward Policies Destroy Farms and Families

¶16. (C) The Bago representative said that the regime's spate of dam building has been extremely detrimental to farmers in the region. During the rainy season, when the dams are not needed to conserve water, the regime opens the dams and flood surrounding villages and cities. The regime is also strict in their demands that farmers cultivate only rice, said the leader from Bago. When farmers deviate from the planned agriculture to grow beans or watermelon, crops well-suited for the region, the regime opens a nearby dam and floods the offending crops out, she said. The Bago representative added that the farmers are willing to risk the ruination of non-sanctioned crops because rice, which they are instructed to grow, does not provide sufficient profit -- especially after being forced to buy fertilizer and petroleum from the government. The Mogok representative said most people in the city support the NLD because of the government's intervention in agriculture, the few civil officials stationed in the city to respond to the citizens' needs, and the gem-mining concessions given to the Wa (who allegedly traffic drugs into the city).

¶17. (C) In Chaung Son, an island in Mon State, many Burmese are forced to migrate to Thailand for work, sometimes in commercial sex work, to raise enough money to support their families, according to the Mon representative. Often, parents are forced to leave their children to fend for themselves for seasons at a time, the older siblings looking after the younger. She said the government does not address the root cause of the problem, but simply erects slogans discouraging trafficking and migration into Thailand. The representative suggested a domestic cottage industry program would be extremely helpful in assisting the Chaung Son residents in becoming self-sufficient.

USDA Increasingly Trying to Identify Itself as an NGO

¶18. (SBU) Currently the USDA is calling itself an NGO, though the public is far from fooled, according to the NLD. During a recent fire in Rangoon in which a purported 2,000 homes burned to the ground, USDA encouraged concerned citizens to donate through USDA. (NOTE: According to one Burmese observer, fire trucks were first seen responding to the scene without water, then had to leave and bring back water to begin fighting the flames with an old-fashioned "bucket brigade." Following the tragedy, the regime posted military at the site to prevent looting. The regime also closed the site off entirely from view, and an AmCit who attempted to observe the burn site was dissuaded by the military.)

¶19. (C) The Bago representative said that the USDA recently offered micro-credit loans to the public. However, she said, as soon as people became organized to accept the loans, USDA wanted applicants to join USDA and pay a fee for accepting the loan. While this scheme failed, USDA successfully coerces party membership in other ways. According to the NLD, USDA waives the school fees for poor people who join the regime party. In addition, the USDA forces the top ten students of each school to join the party, according to NLD. These students receive an assortment of privileges such as domestic scholarships. (In one of the saddest examples of USDA coercion, the party forced its members to pay for USDA party member uniforms that were never provided.)

NLD Cut Off From NGOs and Social Life

¶10. (SBU) Meanwhile, NLD is not allowed to form NGOs, and any NGO or religious association that invites the participation of an NLD member can guarantee regime scrutiny and trouble, say the NLD women. Therefore, NLD members are shunned by NGOs and religious associations. The NLD says that if an NLD member attends a wedding or a funeral, the most basic of social functions, following the event, the regime is likely to make trouble for the relatives of the wedded couple or the deceased. The Karen representative said that although NLD cannot work openly with NGOs, she quietly receives information from them.

¶11. COMMENT: While none of the information in itself offered by the NLD members can be considered surprising, it is none the less galling that a government has so little respect, and feels absolutely no sense of obligation, for the welfare of its people. The information taken together paints a gruesome picture of a regime that is targeting its youth for degradation and destruction. An enemy government could not be much more cruel to the Burmese people than its own currently reigning regime. It is clear that the regime gets away with these atrocities by restricting the flow of

information between regions and dissident parties. This underscores the importance of the U.S. Mission to gather information outside Rangoon, establish a presence in Mandalay, and assist dissidents in networking and accessing information. END COMMENT.
VILLAROSA